



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 29, 2013

By: Kalei Rupp

Alaska (11th Air Force) Rescue Coordination Center completes 5,000th mission

CAMP DENALI, Alaska – Searching for overdue aircraft, rescuing injured hunters, locating lost hikers, helping those stranded at sea, it's all part of the mission of the Alaska (11th Air Force) Rescue Coordination Center, and those missions have added up.

The RCC, located on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, completed its 5,000th mission (since July 1, 1994) on March 27 when it coordinated the Alaska Air National Guard's successful recovery of a pilot who crashed a Super Cub aircraft near the Bering River northeast of Cordova.

"Our mission is to provide a safe and timely response to aircraft events over the land mass of Alaska," said Senior Master Sgt. Robert Carte, superintendent of the RCC. "In addition, we assist any other search-and-rescue agency should they need military assets and coordination, so we're often involved with ground searches and missions in Alaska's waters as well."

The Alaska Rescue Coordination Center has been operating in Alaska since 1961, but beginning July 1, 1994, the RCC became manned solely by Alaska Air National Guardsmen under the operational active-duty commander of the 11th Air Force. Since that time, the men and women of the Alaska Air National Guard have been keeping watch 24 hours a day, seven days a week, coordinating an average of more than five missions a week for nearly 19 years.

"When we get a search-and-rescue mission, we first verify distress and verify jurisdiction of which agency has the lead on the mission depending on the type of incident and location," Carte said. "Once jurisdiction has been established, we hand off search-and-rescue control if we don't have jurisdiction, or if we do, we switch to incident command mode and manage and coordinate the search-and-rescue to the end. We organize fuel for aircraft, assign search grids to participating search aircraft, de-conflict air space and coordinate hospital delivery to make sure emergency medical staff are aware of the situation."

With the active-duty fighter jet presence in Alaska, also comes the job to ensure military pilots training in Alaska airspace have the response they need should something happen.

"Our primary focus is the inland search-and-rescue mission dictated by the national response plan, but we're also here to support the air sovereignty mission in Alaska for the U.S. Northern Command/North American Aerospace Defense Command to make sure any ejection-seat aircraft flying in the state receives top priority should help be needed," Carte said. "These aircraft are the F-22 Raptors, F-16 Fighting Falcon and any foreign military partners that are flying in Alaska during an air-related exercise."

The 12 Alaska Air National Guard members who work in the RCC on a rotating schedule all have a background in either rescue operations as a member of the Alaska Air National Guard's 210th, 211th or 212th Rescue Squadrons, or they are command and control specialists with a background in rescue control operations.

The RCC relies heavily on the support of other agencies during search-and rescue missions. Aside from the Alaska Air National Guard and Alaska Army National Guard, during a mission, these agencies can also be called upon: Alaska State Troopers, U.S. Coast Guard District 17, Civil Air Patrol, National Park Service, North Slope Arctic Borough Search and Rescue, Alaska Mountain Rescue, SEADOGS K-9 Search and Rescue Team, Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol and various other volunteer search groups.

"As attention turns to the arctic, the RCC is also the primary controlling agency for any aviation mission in that region as well, working closely with the U.S. Coast Guard and international partner agencies," Carte said.

Busy season follows the weather trend with an increase in search-and-rescue missions toward the end of summer into the fall hunting season. But ask anyone in the business, and you'll hear that no two search-and-rescue cases are alike. Throughout the years, there have been many high-profile missions that have led to the 5,000 total.

In 2002, Jack Tackle, an experienced climber from Montana was stuck on Mount Augusta in St. Elias National Park more than 9,500 feet above ground with a broken back, fractured neck and bruised spinal cord. The RCC coordinated his rescue and the Alaska Air National Guard pararescueman, Chief Master Sgt. David Shuman, who rescued Tackle was awarded the Airman's Medal for Heroism, and the entire rescue crew received the Earl Ricks Memorial Award for national rescue of the year.

In 2006, the MV Cougar Ace, a Singapore car carrier vessel lost power more than 200 miles south of Adak and listed 60 degrees to port. The RCC coordinated the U.S. Coast Guard assets and Alaska Air National Guard rescue of all 23 crew members onboard.

In 2010, a single-engine float plane crashed 17 miles north of Dillingham killing five onboard, including U.S. Senator Ted Stevens. The RCC coordinated the efforts of the Alaska Air National Guard and U.S. Coast Guard to get to the scene and rescue four survivors.

Recently, the RCC was recognized for its outstanding contribution to commercial aviation safety and its response to numerous aviation incidents throughout the state with the 2013 Alaska Air Carriers Association Emergency Response Award.

"The RCC approaches each mission as if it were one of our family in distress," Carte said. "We know the citizens and state depends on us, and it's not a responsibility we take lightly."

###

Cutline:

AACAward

Alaska Air National Guardsmen with the 11th Air Force Rescue Coordination Center accept the 2013 Alaska Air Carriers Association Emergency Response Award Feb. 13, 2013. The RCC was recognized for its outstanding contribution to commercial aviation safety and its response to numerous aviation incidents throughout the state. Pictured left to right are: Robert Lewis, FAA Alaska Region Administrator; Maj. John Morse, RCC deputy director; Master Sgt. Ken Bellamy, RCC controller; Staff Sgt. Tiffany Alexander, RCC controller; Tech Sgt. Michelle Gillett, RCC controller; Senior Master Sgt. Rob Carte, RCC superintendent, and Mike Stedman, president of Alaska Air Carriers Association. Photo: Rob Stapelton, Medallion Foundation